

VZCZCXYZ0004
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUCNDT #0638/01 1801626
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 291626Z JUN 09
FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6812
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1659
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1151
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0277
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0633

RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 6419
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 0179
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0590
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0111
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 0009
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3792

UNCLAS USUN NEW YORK 000638

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

IO/UNP-AMORRISON; L/UNA; DRL/IRF; S/SRMC; EUR; NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [SP](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

REF: 2008 USUN 814

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) USUN PolCouns attended a June 22 meeting of the Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) as an Observer. The meeting, co-chaired by the Permanent Representatives of Turkey and Spain, provided a briefing on the Second Forum of the AOC, held in Istanbul on April 6-7, 2009, and focused on two action items -- adoption of a draft resolution by the General Assembly in the fall, and the need for contributions to the AOC trust fund. Several delegations mentioned their development of National Plans and Regional Strategies. Upcoming events of the Friends of the AOC include a Ministerial Meeting in September in New York, an Italian side event on "inter-ethnic" cities in September in NY, a Portuguese side event on youth in October in NY, and the next Forums in Brazil in 2010, Qatar in 2011 and Austria in 2012. End summary.

ISTANBUL FORUM FOLLOW UP

¶2. (U) AOC High Representative Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, in a video-taped message, stressed the need to consolidate the gains of the AOC, naming four main achievements: 1-enlargement of the Group of Friends to over 100 members; 2-networks of partnerships with civil society, foundations, private sector and international and regional organizations; 3-putting the AOC on the "international community's agenda as the UN's platform addressing good governance of cultural diversity", and 4-promotion/development of concrete projects on the ground. including (Comment: The phrase "good governance of cultural diversity" remains undefined. Other delegations mentioned during discussions on the margins of the meeting the need to clarify the precise meaning of the term.)

¶3. (U) Sampaio reaffirmed that the four fields of action for the AOC are education, youth, migration and media, and urged the Friends to develop and implement National Plans and Regional Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue. He wants to see the AOC acknowledged as a "full-ranked organization" within the UN, and proposed a resolution in the General Assembly plenary, under the Culture of Peace agenda item, that would recognize the AOC's status and raise its profile.

On budget issues, Sampaio mentioned that the AOC budget of USD 2 million and staff of 10 people was insufficient in light of their growing membership, and encouraged broadening the voluntary donor base beyond the 4 or 5 existing donors to improve the AOC's cashflow.

14. (U) Three countries have joined the AOC since the Istanbul Forum -- Paraguay, Lebanon and Belarus, bringing the total to 103. The Director of the AOC office, Marc Scheuer, noted the presence of the United States as an observer. (Comment: There are no other "observers" to the Group of Friends.)

RESPONSES

15. (U) Some two dozen countries took the floor to express their support for the AOC, with most expressing support for an UNGA resolution but noting that further discussion on the precise language was needed. Russia and Kazakhstan noted they were working on a National Action Plan, while Algeria, Indonesia, Luxembourg and Slovenia mentioned such Plans, and Egypt urged that a regional strategy be developed for the "EuroMed" region. Pakistan's remarks on the discrimination, marginalization, humiliation and disrespect for Islam echoed the sentiments they espouse in discussions of religious intolerance in Durban, Third Committee and other human rights fora. The Pakistani Perm Rep was, however, the only speaker to take such a negative tone. Most remarks were congratulatory of the Istanbul Forum and the AOC's goals of cross-cultural understanding, but light on substance.

16. (U) Italy announced a ranking official from their Foreign Ministry would co-host an event with AOC High Representative

Sampaio and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) on September 28 on the margins of the UNGA ministerial week, entitled "the inter-ethnic city", dealing with issues of urban planning to foster inclusion of minority and migrant populations in cities. They have extended an invitation to Mayor Bloomberg of New York City. Portugal announced they would host a side event on youth in the context of the General Assembly's Third Committee. Austria noted they would hold a symposium in Vienna on 29-30 June on Muslim youth in Europe, political participation and identity issues. IOM invited submissions to a contest they are holding for youth-made videos on migration and diversity, whose winner will be announced on International Migration Day, December 18, 2009. The Perm Rep of Brazil invited the Friends to "save the date" and attend the next Forum on May 28-29, 2010 in Rio, where they hope to have over 1000 attendees.

17. (U) The Council of Europe discussed their "flagship" projects on the teaching of history and on youth "peace camps" which could be coordinated with activities of the AOC, and noted that the Council had joined "without hesitation" an AOC initiative called "Restore Trust" on relations between Muslims and European society. Algeria suggested the appointment of civil society personalities to be Good Will Representatives for the AOC. Indonesia joined others in supporting dialogue and understanding, adding that terrorism was inconsistent with human nature. Argentina asked that high level meetings be limited to times of urgent need, while Focal Points could meet more often, both regionally as a whole. Argentina plans to present a trans-regional "Ibero-America" initiative next year. Canada stated they were eager to be more active, and that the Americas had experience to offer on cross-cultural approaches.

BUDGET CONCERNS

18. (U) AOC Director Marc Scheuer brought attention to the cash flow problems of the AOC, noting that although they were seeking contributions from foundations, corporations and individuals, the bulk of the voluntary funding for the USD 3.3 million budget would need to come from member states. Currently there is a shortfall of over \$1 million. He singled out four projects in particular that need dedicated

funding: expansion of the media mechanism, fellowship, youth solidarity and a Dialogue Cafe. Scheuer thanked Luxembourg, Egypt, Korea, Switzerland, UK and Denmark for the contributions they had made in response to the Secretary-General's letter in early May soliciting funds. Spain, Brazil and Tunisia announced they would contribute to the Trust Fund. Algeria is considering a contribution and Afghanistan said they would make a "symbolic" contribution to the Trust Fund.

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